

The 2015 Israeli Foreign Policy Index of the Mitvim Institute

Key Findings

The 2015 Israeli Foreign Policy Index is based on a public opinion poll conducted for the Mitvim Institute in mid-October 2015 by the Rafi Smith Institute and in cooperation with the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung. It sampled 600 men and women, as a representative sample of the Israeli adult population (Jewish and Arab sectors aged 18 and older) and has a margin of error of 4%.

Israel's global standing:

A majority of the Israeli public believes Israel's global standing is not good. Indeed, they believe it to have deteriorated in comparison to 2014. According to the public, progress on the peace process is required to remedy this situation. However, somewhat paradoxically, the public sees better public diplomacy rather than changes in policies regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the more effective way to improve the country's standing.

The Israeli government's foreign policy:

The Israeli public is dissatisfied with the government's handling of foreign policy, and thinks it has gotten significantly worse in comparison to last year. The public also thinks Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu failed in his efforts to stop the Iranian nuclear program.

The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs:

The public is concerned by recent measures that have weakened the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs. A majority of the public thinks the Foreign Ministry is not fulfilling its mission, and that the dispersal of the ministry's powers as well as the absence of a full-time foreign minister are detrimental to Israel's national security. Most Israelis believe that the country's foreign policy should be based on diplomacy, rather than on the use of force.

The political sphere:

About half of the Israeli public does not identify any prominent Members of Knesset (MKs) in the area of foreign policy. Despite this, noteworthy MKs in this regard are Benjamin Netanyahu, who topped the list, as well as Naftali Bennett and Avigdor Lieberman. As to the major Opposition parties – the Zionist Union and Yesh Atid – only about half the public think they differ from the government on foreign policy

matters, and about a quarter do not have an opinion on the subject whatsoever. In this regard, the public's perception of the two parties is rather similar.

Foreign policy priorities:

Israelis think Israel's foreign policy should prioritize addressing the country's security threats. Ranked second are both the promotion of Israel's ties with the US and advancing the Israeli-Palestinian peace process. In general, most of the public thinks Israel should prioritize solving its own internal problems rather than taking a more active role in global affairs.

Relations with the US and other countries:

Israelis believe their country's relations with the US are mediocre at present, and that they have deteriorated since last year. According to the public, the country with highest importance to Israel, besides the US, is Russia, followed by Germany, and then Egypt, China, and Great Britain (with similar percentages). When asked about relations with Turkey, Israelis find security cooperation regarding Syria and ISIS as the main reason for improving ties with Ankara.

International involvement in the peace process:

Most Israelis think that allowing Arab countries to play a more significant role in the process will help promote peace. They see the possibility of normalized relations with the Arab countries as the primary incentive for increasing their support for the peace process. The public is divided on the question of how Israel should respond to an upcoming EU decision regarding labeling settlement products.

Regional cooperation and belonging:

Most of the Israeli public still believes that regional cooperation between Israel and other Middle Eastern countries is possible, albeit in lower percentages than in 2014. Similarly to the findings of the previous two years, Israelis are still divided in their perception of Israel's regional belonging. They are unsure as to whether Israel belongs in Europe, in the Middle East, or equally in both regions.